

# Early Interactions With New Undergraduates

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Applications to UK universities are at their highest ever (UCAS, 2008) with increases in applications from a more diverse set of students in line with the government's widening participation agenda (Rammell, 2008). This however presents major challenges to universities as such students are more likely to withdraw, thus affecting retention targets. Factors influencing withdrawal have been extensively investigated (Harvey & Drew, 2006; Yorke & Longden, 2007) and are believed to be multi-dimensional. Not only demographic, social and academic factors but also individual differences have a part to play e.g. self-efficacy (Devonport & Lane, 2006).

The project investigates the interactions of academic, social and personal influences on how students settle into university, as well as developing a comprehensive profile of the student body. Three on-line questionnaires were delivered starting at pre-entry, and included personalised feedback.

Personal qualities, particularly self-efficacy, extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism were shown to predict students' self-reported academic and social integration. Findings suggest that providing opportunities to build efficacy beliefs through early online contact with students, providing easily accessible information, reassurance and advice, as well as effective induction strategies, may be important. A dedicated Students' Portal has been developed as one of a number of measures to enhance engagement.